From: Margery Morgan <mgmorgan2014@gmail.com>
To: opinion@nytimes.com
CC: Ehud Barak <ehbarak1@gmail.com>
Date: Thu, 11/13/2014 3:43:02 AM
Subject: Op-Ed submission by Ehud Barak, former Prime Minister and DefenseMinister of Israel

Dear Editors,

I am submitting for your consideration an Op-Ed written by Ehud Barak, Israel's former prime minister and defense minister.

The piece is particularly relevant now in light of the escalating violence in Israel and the Palestinian Authority, amid the increasingly dangerous and volatile situation in the Middle East as a whole.

Mr. Barak identifies a rare opportunity for Israel to remake its relationship with the moderate Arab and Muslim states, and he urges the Israeli government to seize this chance to move toward a more stable, peaceful and prosperous Middle East. And he

But nothing can happen until Israel reopens serious negotiations with the Palestinians and the two sides reach an agreement based on the two-state solution. Mr. Barak presents a proposal for achieving this goal and outlines the dangers of failing to reach it.

You can find the text both pasted into the body of this email and attached as a Word document.

I'll be happy to respond to any questions or comments you may have.

With best regards,

Margery Morgan

Text of the Op-Ed follows:

By Ehud Barak

During the past three years, we in Israel have been living through an ongoing geopolitical earthquake. The Arab Spring has turned into an Islamist Winter. Borders have been erased as old tribal and sectarian disputes reemerge more deadly than ever. Israel is at the epicenter of a clash of civilizations combined with a fierce conflict within Islam, while all the legacy threats – Palestinian terror, Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Assad in Syria, Iran – are still alive and kicking.

Sometimes, however, opportunity knocks and offers a once-in-a-generation chance to radically reshape reality. At these crucial moments, if we are fortunate, a courageous leader will step forward, seize the opportunity and act to resolve seemingly intractable problems. David Ben-Gurion declared the establishment of the State of Israel, Menachem Begin forged a daring peace with Egypt and Yitzhak Rabin recognized the PLO and signed a peace treaty with Jordan. They all faced tremendous risks, both politically and personally, yet they went for it. Such is the essence of true leadership, the defining element of greatness.

Now that time has come again – and while the knocking on the door can be plainly heard, no one in our current leadership is willing to open it. Following a profound realignment of interests, Israel, the strongest country in the region, now has a chance to remake its relationship with the moderate Arab and Muslim states – Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, Egypt, Jordan and Turkey – based on our shared concerns about extremism, terrorism and the rise of Iran. The new relationship, built on synergies and cooperation rather than vengeance and violence, would lead inevitably to a more stable, peaceful and prosperous Middle East. There is, however, only one way to achieve this goal: a strong, self-confident Israel must immediately reopen serious negotiations with the Palestinians, backed by the United States and the Quartet. Israel will strive to reach a peace agreement based on a two-state solution, while at the same time continuing to fight terror and preserve its qualitative military edge.

How would this come about? Israel's most profound internal debate centers on the relationship between Israel's legitimate security needs and the feasibility of the two-state solution. All Israelis agree that we live in a tough, merciless and volatile neighborhood, even more so recently. So we must build "safety margins" into any future security planning. But this certainly does not mean abandoning the two-state solution in favor of some sort of one-state solution, which would inevitably lead to either a non-Jewish or a non-democratic Israel. Neither of these options fulfills the Zionist dream. In fact, they endanger it.

The right-wing believes the "lesson" of recent years is that Israel's security and the two-state solution are incompatible. But their alternative – to hold on to everything and give the Palestinians "autonomy" in certain areas of the West Bank – is totally delusional. It will be brutally rejected by the entire world, including our best friends and all potential partners for regional peace, not to mention the Palestinians who have been repudiating it for more than 40 years. Both Palestinian "autonomy" and the one-state solution are recipes for growing international isolation and an even bloodier future for Israel. It is our Government's role to make sure the recent rash of stabbings and vehicular attacks in the streets of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv does not become a preview of what's to come. We must act decisively but responsibly to halt the new wave of violence. Thus, the two most compelling imperatives for Israel are to disengage from the Palestinians by setting internationally recognized borders and to prevent the conflict around Jerusalem's Temple Mount from igniting our political dispute with the Palestinians into a religious war with the entire Muslim world.

We must delineate a border that will include the large settlement blocs in exchange for mutually agreed land swaps; Jerusalem's Jewish suburbs and its holy sites; a security area east of Ben-Gurion International Airport; and a long-term military presence along the Jordan River. A border within which Israel will have a solid Jewish majority for generations to come and beyond which a viable independent, demilitarized Palestinian state can flourish.

And we have to consider adapting the Saudi or the Arab League plan, with all relevant Israeli reservations on the table, as a basis for negotiations. It may take time, there may be setbacks. The Palestinians are not easy partners; certain periods of interim arrangements, even well-calculated unilateral steps coordinated with the United States and the Quartet, might be necessary. Within the regional context, the future Palestinian state could be integrated into a mutually agreed structure that might include Jordan, Israel and/or other neighbors. But to make the most of the current opportunity for regional peace, sincere negotiations to resolve the Palestinian issue must be the first order of business; it is the only realistic way forward.

Based on my professional judgment after many decades in uniform, I confidently conclude that this arrangement would enable the Israeli Defense Forces to defend the state better than they can today. And I'm also confident that the vast majority of Israel's former senior commanders and intelligence chiefs would agree with me on this issue.

Navigating this rocky road requires, first and foremost, a powerful Israel whose armed forces are capable of deterring and defeating any combination of future threats (including terror), plus rock-solid diplomatic backing to repel attacks against Israel in the United Nations and elsewhere. That means Israel must work harmoniously with the United States, its President, the Congress and the American public – our closest and most reliable allies. This unique relationship, built on common values and mutual respect over the past five decades, is and always will be a cornerstone of our strength and standing in the world.

In my meetings with President Obama and Presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton before him, I always stressed that Israel is a sovereign nation that will make its own decisions and act upon them when it feels its vital interests are at stake. We cannot and will not delegate the responsibility for such decisions into the hands of even our best friend: America. By the same token, I repeatedly reminded my colleagues in the Israeli cabinet that we must respect the right of the United States to hold its own positions on issues it considers crucial and never forget the pivotal role America plays in ensuring Israel's survival.

For 40 years, the United States has assured Israel's military qualitative edge, whether through the delivery of the newest F-35 fighters, financing the Iron Dome missile defense system or maintaining an unprecedented intimacy between our intelligence communities, among others.

We all have to realize that we are now facing a moment of truth, a time for daring decisions and paradigm-changing actions. We can no longer afford the paralysis engendered by the politics of anxiety, pessimism and hopelessness, which often enough become self-fulfilling prophecies. The essence of Zionism, its very raison d'être, calls for changing the realities of Jewish existence by taking our fate into our own hands and proactively shaping our future, rather than being dragged down a slippery slope by the arbitrary forces of history.

Yes, we hear the knocking. It's time to open the door.

The writer served as Israel's tenth Prime Minister (1999-2001) and twice as Defense Minister (1999-2001 and 2007-2013). The most decorated soldier in the history of the Israel Defense Forces, his 36-year military career culminated with his appointment as Chief of General Staff.

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